



**Interview with Janos Moog, veteran of the 25th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS "Hungary", Rechnitz, 1989.**



*Thank you for meeting with me. I would like to hear from you how you came to join the Waffen-SS and fight for Germany.*

Janos: First things first, I never joined the German SS and did not fight for Germany. I was a Hungarian citizen and was drafted into the army in 1944 to fight against the Russians. I was an 18-year-old student at the time and my country was occupied by the Germans to keep us in the war. People were mostly pro-Germany because we knew what a Russian victory would mean for us. The Russians entered Hungarian territory and started doing what they are known for: rounding up dissidents who were never heard from again. The sentiment was not anti-Germany and we knew that Hitler was right and was only trying to protect Europe from the evils of communism. Some did not like the heavy hand the Germans were using, but we

understood that war led to extreme measures.

Many of my classmates joined the army or were drafted. You needed your parents' permission to volunteer before 1944.



Skorzeny, von Fölkersam (centre) and on the right company commander of the 1./SS-Jäger-Bataillon 502 SS-Obersturmführer d. R. Werner Hunke (partly also identified as Walter Girg) on the way to the Sándor Palace in the courtyard (or on the promenade in front of the palace building) of the Budapest Castle Palace after the operation "Panzerfaust" on October 16, 1944.



The new imperial administrator Ferenc Szálasi followed by his adjutant Ernő Gömbös on the way to the reception in the Sándor Palace.

I was ready to enlist when the Germans helped to overthrow [Miklós] Horthy and install a loyal

government. I was rounded up with many others and told that there was a great danger from the East and every able-bodied person was needed.

Even the girls were recruited for war work, either nursing, food production or factory work. It was a very difficult time for Hungary; we had shared our fate with Germany and could not back down when it mattered. Our leader announced a new formation of the SS, an elite unit consisting only of Hungarians and speaking Hungarian. We were to fight only against the Russians and receive German weapons and equipment.

Everyone had to agree to this, anyone who did not agree was sent to the German army or militia units. I agreed to serve in this Hungarian division and we wore a colored badge in honor of Hungary and our national shield on our sleeve. We were not Germans, we were Hungarians trained and organized to fight the Russians when they came. The civilians came to see us off and gave us what little they had as a parting gift. Our train was to take us to Neuhammer, which is near Reitschen.

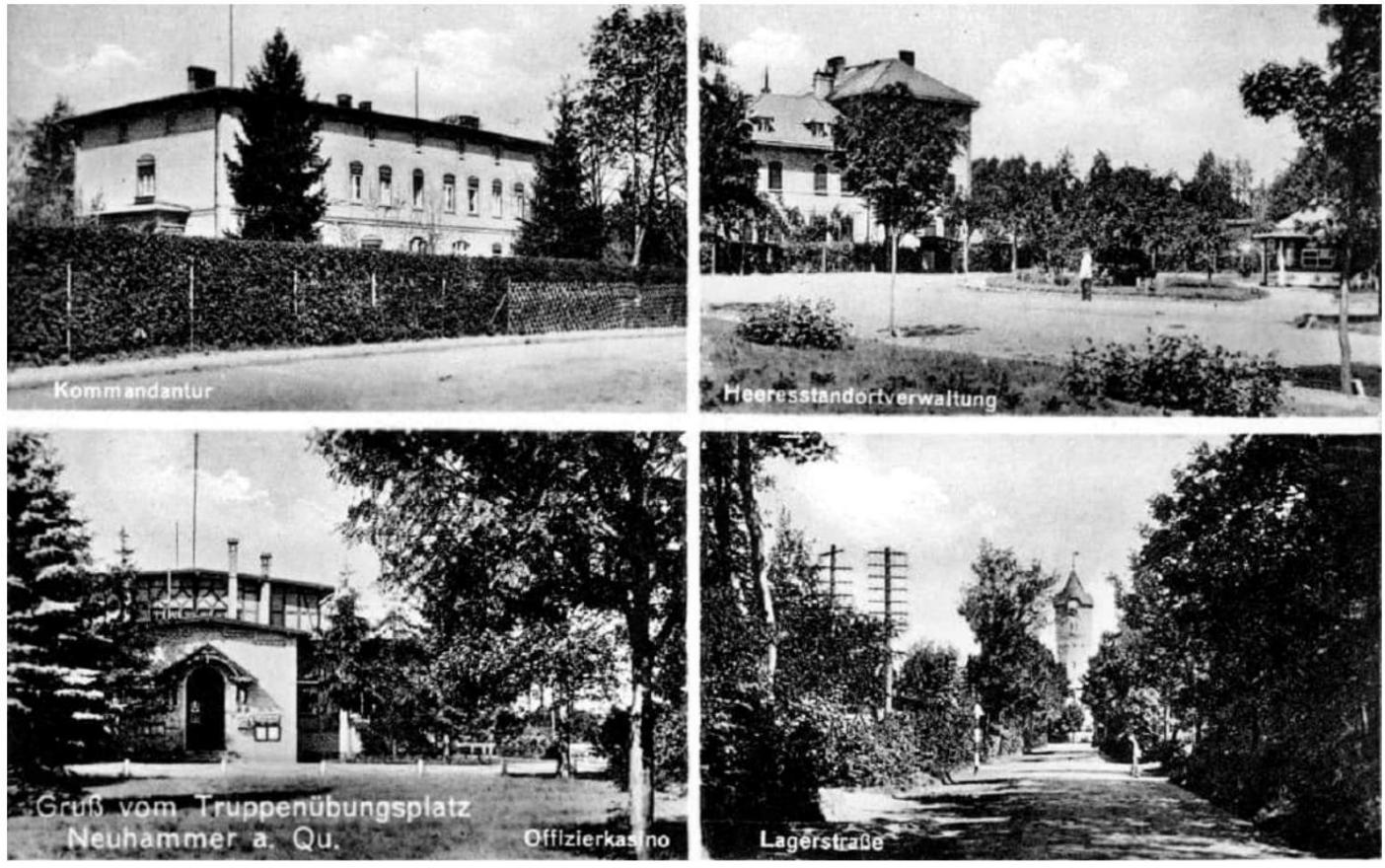
We were quartered on a large military base and were allowed to explore the area. I liked fishing and there were large lakes nearby that



One heart, one will - forward to victory!



met my needs. When our training began, I did not have this luxury very often. However, I was able to meet a girl here. There was a childcare camp for evacuated children nearby and she was a BDM helper. I met her while fishing; she was hiking and stumbled upon me. She spoke poor Hungarian, just as I spoke poor German, so we had to make do with that. She invited me to a picnic and we enjoyed the weather while trying to converse. I saw her sometimes on the weekends and she was worth my trying to learn German for her. Since the training was long and intensive, we never really had the chance to build a relationship. When we had to be evacuated, I got a kiss, my first ever, and I always wondered what became of her. I remember that she was from Graz.



Neuhammer military training area 1934-1938

*The Hungarians did not consider wearing German uniforms as fighting for Germany?*

Janos: No, we didn't. Germany was our ally and we considered them comrades, but we were different. The Hungarians sometimes thought the Germans were overbearing and arrogant, but on the whole we got along well. I saw very few problems in terms of the treatment of our men. There were a few altercations where a German would ask us to do something that was not part of our orders. Our officers spoke German and could usually defuse the situation, but one day a fight broke out. A senior NCO was courting a girl on the base who was a laundress; one of our men had complimented her and patted her bottom. He saw this and went at him like a bull. They were both imprisoned for a few days to cool off.



We wore Hungarian uniforms, but had German weapons and equipment; we also wore the famous German



Helm. We were treated just like any other unit of the Waffen-SS. That's why I say we didn't fight for Germany. We fought for something bigger, for Europe as a whole.

We understood that we were fighting to stop communism and those who defended it. That's why many of us joined the Germans to help, we joined them to save our country. The rumors of bombings, looting and rape by the Russians made us sit up and take notice. I know that many comrades were upset that it took so long to set up the division.



Men of "Hunyadi"

*Due to the short period of time between the formation of the division and its withdrawal from Neuhammer Camp in February 1945, the issue of German uniforms to this division was very limited. Other uniforms provided to the division consisted of captured uniforms, including Italian, French and Czech uniforms (and possibly others). Hungarian Honvéd uniforms were worn along with some civilian clothing.*

Then we had to do maneuvers with each unit to work together.

Before we went into battle, we had a parade where high SS leaders came to wish us well and say goodbye. It was quite a big deal and Himmler even gave the order to serve a nice dinner and a statement was read from him thanking us for coming to the aid of Europe and defending our culture. We felt honored that so many came to thank us for continuing the fight.

*Have you ever seen evidence of war crimes committed by the Germans or the Allies?*

Janos: I have to tell you honestly, no. I was there at the end of the war and therefore I am not the best person to ask that question. War is an unpleasant business and unfair to those fighting. I only heard of any accusations after the war.

The Americans talked about how bad Hitler was and that we were fighting for evil, killing Jews and destroying Europe. We didn't want to hear that, of course, because we didn't destroy anything and had nothing to do with Jews. I spoke to Germans who told me that they saw the consequences of Allied crimes, like murdered prisoners and civilians. I saw the consequences of bombings and the dead, but that was all. I didn't see any examples of the Germans committing crimes either. We took prisoners, just like they did, and we were ordered to treat them well.



*Members of the Arrow Cross Party arrest Jews. Budapest, October-December 1944.*

The Soviets today accuse my country of helping to kill Jews, but that is nonsense.

The political arm of our government [*the Arrow Cross Party*] rounded them up and allowed the Germans to send them to camps. The Jews in Hungary were not very numerous, but they had a reputation for siding with the Reds and actively helping them. Just as in 1956, Jews were prominent in the Red movements and the Germans did what our then leader did not want to do: throw them out.



*When did your division go into action and what was it like for you?*

Janos: Oh man, let me think. I think it was when we were on the trains on the way to training. Airplanes attacked us and killed 20 men. That was before we could even defend ourselves, we were easy prey. Many were wounded even before they could take the oath to the Führer and our leaders. Then, in February 1945,

the commander of the Neuhammer base put us on alert and we had to prepare to defend the base and the town. The Russians were only 60 km away, they said, and we could hear sounds of fighting. We had to go to a river to form a defensive ring. I was the last one, because it was mostly older men with combat experience who were sent first.



*Officers' mess of the 25th WGDSS "Hunyadi" in Neuhammer, shortly before the Soviet advance on the camp. From right to left in the photo: Waffen-Generalmajor of the SS Josef Grassy, ("Hunyadi" commander), SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Fanslau (Head of the Personnel Office of the Waffen-SS) and Waffen-Sturmbannführer of the SS Adam von Podhradszky, the first staff officer of the "Hunyadi" division.*

We had hardly any weapons and our leaders were very angry. Some of our men had been assigned to officer training, who, as I later

learned, died in Dresden. Our unit was given anti-tank guns and assault guns. We were good at hiding these guns behind trees and camouflaging them so that they could not be seen for many meters.

This paid off in the end when we took out American tanks that didn't know what had hit them or where it came from. Meanwhile we continued training and every day the mood got worse because the Germans couldn't get us supplies. Some days our supply unit had to go out and look for food; luckily they found enough to feed us. The local Gauleiter sent someone to see who was stealing the crops and animals. It was a bad time for us.



*Waffen-Generalleutnant of the SS Josef Grassy (second from right) at a meeting with Hungarian SS officers in Hilpotstein at the end of February or beginning of March 1945. On the far right is Waffen-Obersturmführer of the SS Dr. Bela v. Liszka.*

When he saw who we were, he dismissed the complaints and our leaders met with him to ask for help, which we received at the next base we came to.

It was decided to leave Neuhammer and when we arrived at the next base we had a lot of weapons of all kinds and food. The Gauleiter seemed to be pulling the strings and we now had what we needed. We had to be careful whenever we moved because the Allies were everywhere. They shot at anything on the ground, whether military or civilian. When we were out in our truck to get supplies or train we had to post a driver on the hood to look up at the sky. As we moved west we saw them shooting at the roads and many vehicles

destroyed.



Our first real battle was against Patton and his Third Army, with Sherman tanks taking out our front line. I think it was the end of April now when we went into action, that's how long it took. Many men were angry that we weren't fighting the Russians to save our country, but the Americans were the enemy too, so in the end it made no difference. We were merged with our sister Hungarian division and moved to Austria to regroup and reorganize. The Hungarian government was now giving us orders, as the Germans had broken up into small combat units with no real headquarters. Our battles against the Americans were very short and, apart from knocking out a few tanks, fairly uneventful. We spent more time retreating than actually fighting the enemy, as our AA would sometimes attack the planes while we watched. There were small skirmishes in the villages that resulted in casualties, but mostly the Americans retreated to avoid casualties and we retreated to form better lines.



*How was the end of the war for you?*

Janos: Well, in May '45 we were at the end. We knew that the Russians had taken our houses and the war was lost. We longed to return to our families because we were afraid of what it might mean if we helped Germany and stayed in the war.

Our commander received the order to surrender to the Americans and he did so. The Americans arrived in a *1st Ski Battalion, Austria 1945*

Jeep looking like cowboys. They went inside to talk to our commander who then came out to our large group and announced that it was over. We would soon be going home. We were lucky in that our new government made peace with the Russians and told them that we were forced to fight for Germany and that we did not want war. Many of us did not agree with this, but it was easier to bear knowing that we could go home and see our families. We were assured that no one would take revenge, which was a lie. Many men were later sent to camps, and some of our leaders were shot when the NKVD began investigating. I was lucky that I was not tattooed as an SS and that the Russians did not capture me.

Some of my unit stayed here in the former Reich and settled or went to other countries after being reunited with their families back home. By and large, the Americans treated us well and made sure we got food and medical care, they simply said we had been forced to fight against them so all was forgiven. They were curious people, they treated me well, but I hear more and more that others were not treated well at all. Many Germans I met told of mistreatment, and the other foreign volunteers of the Waffen SS suffered worse fates. When I returned home, it was grim and I was kept hidden by my family until it was decided to go to the West, as the Russians had rounded up everyone who disagreed with their rule. Many Jews returned to take revenge on the people too. I have heard of roving armed gangs looking for collaborators, former comrades and anyone who spoke out against them. Many Hungarians were sent to camps or simply disappeared forever, we were happy to get out of here.



Statue of the combat group "Deak"



**Below are some pictures of the murder of Ferenc Szálasi.**



*Members of the former Szálasi government, Prime Minister Ferenc Szálasi, Deputy Prime Minister Jenő Szöllősi, Foreign Minister Gábor Baron Kemény and Defence Minister Károly Beregfy at the hearing in the main hall of the Music Academy.*



*Ferenc Szálasi in a prison cell*



*Bogar, the executioner and his companion before the execution of Ferenc Szálasi and his comrades, 1946.*





March 12, 1946. The courtyard of the courthouse in Markó Street: After the coroner declared them dead, the bodies of the Arrow Cross Party members were put on public display. From left to right: Ferenc Szálasi; Gábor Vajna, Minister of the Interior; Károly Beregfy, Minister of Defense; and József Gera, key figure of the Arrow Cross Party.

The last words of Ferenc Szalasi, March 12, 1946

*The spirit is always stronger than anything else. If truth is the servant of life, then truth will be victorious and not fleeting. This war was not won by anyone. The purpose of war is not to knock the weapon out of the hands of the fighting party, but that the peace that follows will be realized on the basis of the well-being and security of all. I am convinced that the current events are not over yet. Neither party has won. The great world question, the problems that came to the surface during the war, are still unresolved. From the standpoint of the destiny that lives within me and from the standpoint of the new world, I have always taken such steps that, in my opinion, should serve the glory and happiness of the Hungarian nation...*

*What has been said about me is untrue and seriously tarnishes my honor.*